## Supervisor Piepho's opinion editorial for the State of Levees

The state of our levees in California is one of the most critical emergency preparedness issues that we face.

If a levee breaks on one of the western Delta islands, or if a break of two or more levees should occur within the larger Delta, fresh water supply to two-thirds of our state would be disrupted. Crops would be lost and valuable fish and wildlife habitats destroyed, with the possibility of flooding in urban areas.

High flow flood events and earthquakes are the most likely scenarios to result in a levee failure. For Contra Costa County, we are on a heightened alert since we have six of the eight western Delta islands in our geographic boundary.

Overall, our levees are in good condition but the entire system needs additional work to bring them up to higher levels of standard and to decrease the threat of a levee break.

The breach at Jones Tract is a lesson for all of us? a costly one at that. It is important to note that the Jones Tract breach occurred on a levee that was not experiencing known stability problems or during a high flow or flood conditions. It occurred under fairly normal, day-to-day circumstances.

At the epicenter to this dialogue and interest is the fact that there is not consensus on how to fix the Delta. We can all agree there is a problem but very few solutions. Additionally, recognizing that the Delta is a critical component of our state's infrastructure, there is no more vital gift than the gift of water.

Levee repair has not been a priority over other Delta considerations. As a result, the risk of levee failure escalates while strengthening is sporadic, insufficient and significantly under funded. State and federal funding, properly managed and focused on short-term as well as long-term solutions, is vital.

Our county has been a longtime advocate on this front and has spearheaded many efforts to bring attention to this issue. The recent hurricane devastation provides us with a window of opportunity to now gain the public's interest and awareness of this critical issue.

I'm proud to say that Contra Costa County has taken a leadership role and is organizing a broad-based coalition of relevant agencies to advocate for funding while we struggle to avoid catastrophe. Another and last critical element is the lack of consistency of water management in our state and federal governments.

Leadership changes with the tide of elections, the changes of power between parties and other external forces. While we have an institutional leader of our federal reserve system in our nation - the economic barometer that struggles to maintain low inflation and balances our national economic structure - no such leadership exists with the management of the critical element of life itself. Water delivers food to our tables, life to our bodies, but it's driven by politics, not practicality and without consistency.

I will continue to work hard on the issue of levee maintenance to ensure that we are all prepared when we experience the next instance of a natural disaster.